There have been many “Invitations” in my life that would have made little difference if I had said “yes or no,” but some invitations are divine and life changing. Like when I accepted the invitation to receive Christ as my Lord and Savior, and saying “yes” to His call to a life of ministry. There have been hundreds of invitations that have directed the course of my life.

In 1969, I was an eighteen year old high school graduate living in a small town in southern California. I had no plans or direction, and I was very impressionable. I was walking down Main Street and passed-by the United States Marine Corps Recruiting Office. The recruiter was standing out on the sidewalk in front of the office in his dress-blues, and as I walked by he said, “Ever thought about becoming a United States Marine?” I stopped and he said, “I'm inviting you to be part something important for you and your country, and it will change your life forever.” I said “yes” to the invitation and wow, was he ever right about the change-your-life-forever part! Accepting that invitation did change my life forever, and I'm so glad I said “yes.” I will always be very proud of my service in the Marine Corps.

Within a few weeks I was off to boot camp, and six months later I arrived in Viet Nam. I came home from my Viet Nam experience with all the internal wounds and confusion.
common to the vets of that era. I got busy with trying to adjust back into life as I had known it, but simply no longer existed. I did a decade of self-medicating and dysfunction. My wife, Maria and I, were newlyweds and not doing well because of my unresolved issues when an invitation to receive Jesus Christ changed our life. That led later to an invitation to full time ministry and starting a church in Southern Nevada.

Our lives and purpose was on course and we were assured our steps were ordered by the Lord, but I had an unresolved desire in my soul. I wished I could go back to Viet Nam as a Christian, and just do something good, but how impossible was that?

In 1989, we were having a mission convention at our church. I was standing in the lobby waiting for our Mission’s speaker, Bill Prevett, who I had never met. He walked in the door, came up to me and said, “I’m Bill, are you a Viet Nam Vet?” I thought that was strange, and caught a little off guard, said “yes.” He said “I would like to invite you to go to Viet Nam with some other vets. Would you consider going back to Viet Nam?”

Come to find out he had met Bill Kimball, the founder of Vets With A Mission. Bill had asked him to put some pastors that were Viet Nam vets in touch with him. He gave me all the information, and within a few weeks, I was set to return to Viet Nam. That was another invitation that would change my life.

My first trip back to Viet Nam, like so many vets, was a very healing experience. Over the next ten years, I participated in many trips and projects as well as serving on the VWAM board. My wife Maria has gone on many trips (See the photo on the next page), as well as my Son Matthew when he was sixteen. That experience lasts to this day. On two occasions, I took a team of men and women from our church to help with projects.
During another Viet Nam team trip, Phil carries Maria across a river somewhere in central Viet Nam. His church had a part in many projects and programs, including the renovation of an orphanage and building a rural healthcare clinic.

The stories and relationships that filled our lives through VWAM could create a library of laughter, healing, and joy. I remember all the long plane rides and logistical nightmares; the cases of “Pepto Bismol Disease” that never allowed us to leave the hotel room; the fever's and cold sweats. Then there were the exciting rides through the different cities and villages, the buildings and projects that seemed impossible in planning, but became miracle realities by faith. I recall all the different leaders and team members that sacrificed, and gave of themselves to serve the wonderful people of Viet Nam.

Vets With A Mission has been used of the Lord to shape a huge part of my life. I am so grateful and humbled to have been "invited" to be part of something that has, and continues to make, a profound difference for the hurting people of Viet Nam.

Phil Carney